

## Baits are the Best Choice for Fire Ant Control

By Clark McAlister

Fire ants are a yearly problem for Dawsonville homeowners. Some people are seriously allergic to their stings, and I certainly don't want my kids playing near them. They love to make large, unsightly mounds in our lawn turf and flower beds. Few people escape having to deal with fire ants. Here are some tips to deal with these nasty pests.

To control fire ants in your yard, most hardware stores have two options: broadcast poisons and baits. Most of the broadcast ant poisons consist of granular clay particles coated with a non-selective insecticide, often bifenthrin. Ants are killed when they come in contact with the chemical residues.

Also in this category is acephate (Orthene), which comes in a dust formulation. Acephate can be sprinkled on top of the mound or used as a mound drench solution. For a drench solution, mix the recommended amount of dust formulation into two gallons of water and pour out the solution over the entire mound. Although this method can be effective, it takes a long time and a lot of product to treat several mounds.

Baits are my preferred method for controlling fire ants. Most fire ant baits are made of corn cob saturated with soybean oil and active ingredients. Common active ingredients in bait products are indoxacarb, hydramethylnon, and methoprene. Commonly available brand name baits include Amdro B, Spectracide One Shot, Extinguish, and others.

Fire ant baits consist of acute poisons which kill fire ants slowly after consumption. This strategically allows the bait to be brought into the nests and passed around to many ants.

Because they use oil as a chemical carrier, fire ant baits do not last in storage very long and are prone to spoilage. Only buy the smallest amount of bait you will need to treat your lawn or landscape, as leftover bait from previous seasons is most likely not useful this year.

When applying baits, avoid dumping the granules directly on top of the mounds. Fire ants rarely forage for food directly on top of their mounds, so they will be more likely to pick up bait granules away from their mounds. Broadcast bait granules over the entire yard, or in concentric circles away from the mound.

The best time for ant bait application is warm, sunny days in spring and fall. If possible, wait until afternoon to apply your bait, as this allows any morning dew to dry up. Baits should never be applied to wet grasses or soils, as this will render them useless.

Avoid disturbing mounds before and during treatment, which will cause workers to emit alarm hormones. Defensive fire ants will only concern themselves with colony defense, not eating the bait you are applying for them.

Once applied, baits should be gone within a few hours as the fire ants begin to forage. Give it a week to ten days before you expect to see a reduction in fire ant activity. If the mound is still active after this time, a follow-up treatment may be needed.

Red imported fire ants are one of the more difficult insects for homeowners to control. It takes the right product, following the right protocol, and a lot of patience. If done right, your yard can be fire ant-free for the rest of the season.